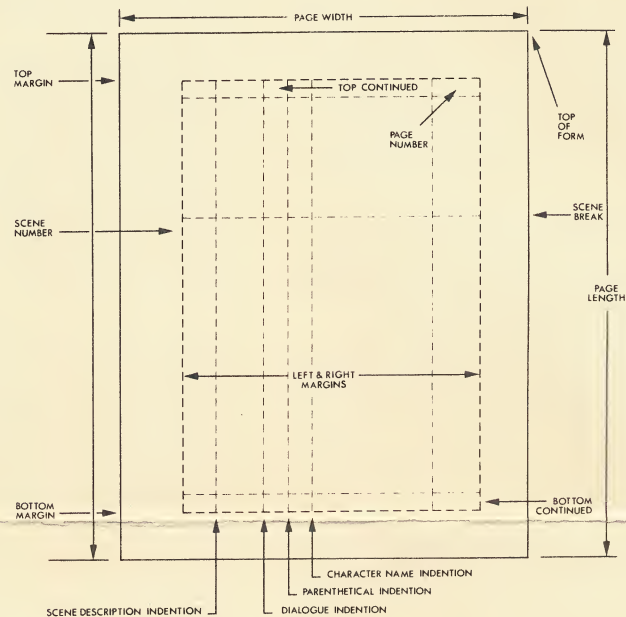


# Choices: The Genesis of Scriptor

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Go into any computer store, prepare to purchase a system, then ask the salesman, "Can I write screenplays on it?" Almost without exception, he will tell you, "Sure. Why not?" **WRONG!** To computer people, "film script" means "manuscript" — double-spaced margin-to-margin text. But computerized screenwriters have found that most of the pitfalls are "invisible" until you actually start to write. This article attempts to explain what the problems are, and how we at Screenplay Systems set out to solve them.

## WHAT MAKES A SCREENPLAY DIFFERENT?

The motion picture script was invented around the time sound movies came into existence. It is a funny-looking document, with multiple margins, capitalized scene "sluglines," left and right-side scene numbering, and a specialized set of rules for choosing aesthetic and permissible page breaks. Screenplay format serves one principle function: readability. The document size is staggering to a computer; an average movie script is 100-130 pages in length. Also, it goes through constant rewrites and can take several months to several years to develop into a shootable script.

## THE BIRTH OF SCRIPTOR

The creation of Scriptor came about almost by accident. Our company wanted to invest in a word processor for writing screenplays. We saw the process in two phases: getting the words into the computer and getting them out.

Entering a screenplay into the computer proved to be easy. At worst, we could write the script using the computer as an electronic typewriter — tabbing in to the appropriate columns and hitting a return at the end of each line. Computers, however, are supposed to make everything easier (so it says in fine print).

Wasn't there an easier way to change both left and right margins simultaneously?

As recently as a year ago the answer was "No." Fortunately programmable function keys came into vogue with computer designers, and the manual work has gone out of changing margins. Function keys and their software emulators (like Smartkey and ProKey) allow screenwriters to place several margin changing commands into a single key. Sorry, fellas, but margin changing will never be easier than one keystroke. (At this point in time, margin changing seems to work better with WordStar than other text editors — see Michael Brown's article for comments on why this is true. ed.)

## THE PAGINATION PROBLEM

Once the writer arms himself with programmable function keys, composing in screenplay format is a breeze. The real problem then seems to be getting the words out of the computer. The shortcoming of every text editor we encountered (WordStar, Perfect Writer, Benchmark and Select, to name only a few) was that they had no idea why a screenplay was different than a business letter. The greatest problem seemed to be "how do you get 110 feet—7,920 lines—of continuous screenplay paginated and neatly placed on 120 sheets of paper?"

"**HOLD EVERYTHING!** Why can't WordStar (or your favorite CP/M-based text editor) paginate my script?" Answer: Although it can paginate a letter, novel, report or just about anything else, it can't paginate a screenplay automatically. WordStar determines where to make page breaks by counting lines. When the page is full, it continues the text onto the next one. This is a blessing for novel writing, but anathema to film scripts. WordStar's automatic pagination can

result in character names being severed from dialogue or action slug lines being separated from their scenes. And this is unacceptable to your favorite producer, who is more concerned with readability after a long day at the studio than with computerization!

"**BUT WAIT!** Why can't I imbed codes (like .PA or .CP) to force the break where I want it to be?" Good try. You can do this, but imagine a typical scenario: you've just placed "forced" page breaks, along with other standard screenplay constructs and top and bottom CONTINUED's at the end of each of your 120 pages. You print up the script, then suddenly notice a scene you forgot to rewrite. The scene is on page 5, and the result of your editing is the addition of 8 lines. You have now thrown your entire script out of pagination and your page breaks no longer line up. This is a First Draft, and has to look letter-perfect for Mr. Producer.

You yell and kick and scream, then sit down at your CRT and delete all the forced page breaks, and top and bottom CONTINUED's. You connect any paragraphs of dialogue that have split from one page to the next, inserting the character's name and proper notation as well. Then you repaginate again. A few hours later, you pray you don't think of any new revisions for a few weeks...

"**CAN'T I USE SPECIAL CODES TO FORCE EVERY PARAGRAPH NOT TO BE SPLIT BY WORDSTAR?**" Sure. In fact, many text editors and some special programs are designed around this concept. By telling the software where it cannot break, you prevent making breaks in unwanted places. But you still have to make special breaks for long passages of dialogue and description, and manually add the dreaded top and bottom CONTINUED's in production scripts at least.